EXPRESS OPINION

Pathetic and childish, Mr Hawke

WE could understand it if some "neutralist" Mickey Mouse State from the Third World denied one of our aircraft-carriers dry dock facilities.

But Australia?

Has it sunk to this pathetic level already—after only nine months of Bob Hawke's Socialist government?

His Defence Minister refused to give a straight answer in the Australian Parliament about the reasons for barring the Invincible.

But there seems little doubt that the Administration's policy of banning nuclear weapons from Australian soil is behind the decision. (Not that anyone knows whether the Invincible is actually carrying such weapons!)

In declaring Australia to be a "Nuclear Free Zone," Hawke puts himself in the puerile company of GLC leader Ken Livingstone and his clones around Britain who have declared their patches to be similarly "nuclear free."

A worthless, childish gesture. Not inappropriate for the Livingstones of this world.

But quite inappropriate for the leader of a major nation wishing to play its part—as Australians do—in helping the Western democracies keep the light of freedom alive.

We know Hawke wants to make his country a Republic. Does he think souring relations between our two peoples, with gestures like this, is a means to that shoddy end?

Time to end this airline 'bumping'

AT least 750 British Airways passengers are seriously delayed every month: denied their reserved seats—"bumped"—because the airline has overbooked flights.

British Airways, adopting the true voice of a State-owned concern, says "we make no apologies." It regards the practice as perfectly acceptable.

To be fair, overbooking, and the "bumping" it causes, is the result of the flying public's habit of reserving seats and then not turning up to take them.

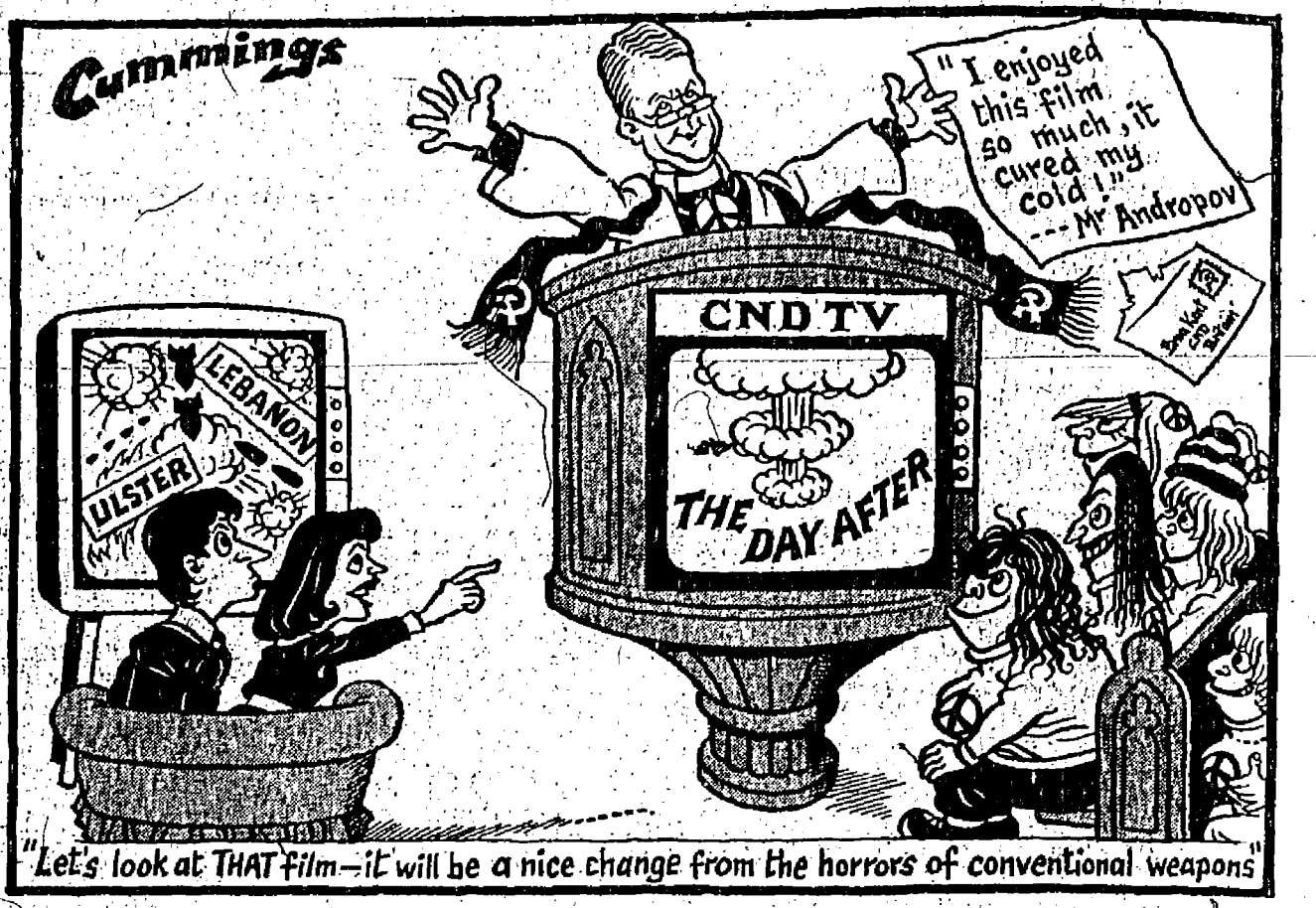
To head off financial loss because of this, all airlines routinely overbook.

It is time to devise a better answer—for the sake of the airlines as well as the public.

Both will have to change present practices.

Far better to bring some discipline into the system (why not a deposit made at the time of reservation for all flights?) than to do nothing about the rising ill-will caused by "bumping."

On the day before The Day After...



Why this TV fiction will never be fact

TOMORROW night, millions of British families will watch one of the most controversial TV films in history. The film, The Day After, shows the effects of a Russian nuclear attack on Kansas City. It set the whole of America talking, and will do the same here. Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine starts the great debate:



BY THE Rt. Hon.
MICHAEL HESELTINE
DEFENCE SECRETARY

IF YOU tune into The Day After on ITV tomorrow prepare to be bombarded by a relentless succession of images of horror. But remember also the hidden political message.

My guess is that many of you will find this an inadequate film. The subject matter is so daunting that it carries a work that in itself is not an example of film-making at its best.

But that is not my concern. My responsibility is to question what I believe to be little more than a one-sided view. It is sadly unbalanced.

The message of the recent General Election is clear. Thumbs up for deterrence. Thumbs down for the one-sided disarmers of Labour and their CND friends.

Since then CND have reaffirmed that they want Britain to leave NATO.

The danger of a film like this is that it might whip up emotions that will give them a degree of public support that all their arguments have failed to achieve.

HORROR

The Day After *is* a political statement about nuclear war, if for no other reason than that it is being shown on the very weekend of yet more major demonstrations at Greenham Common and on the second anniversary of the protest camp.

Of course the one-sided disarmers in this country want to play on the understandable horor that we all feel, to portray present defence policies as making an outbreak of war inevitable.

I have said that people would watch this film. It is important that everyone should know what would happen *if deterrence* failed.

Over half the electorate do not have their own memories of the horror of the two World Wars. Some of the critics of our deterrence strategy argue as though conventional wars are somehow tolerable. They aren't.

We should never forget that over 50 million people were killed in the "conventional" Second World War. Our policy is to deter any Soviet attack nuclear or conventional.

The horrendous consequences of nuclear war are inescapable and that is precisely why the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons is so powerful. The events in this film have never happened—and I believe will never happen — because both sides would lose and both sides know it.

Of course there are risks in this balance of terror and we must do all that we can to reduce them. But the film has nothing to say about this key issue.

The company who made it tell you *at the end* that they have taken no position on how such an event may happen or be avoided.

What the film *does do* is provide snippets of background talk about the developing crisis which you could be forgiven for taking to be their views of how war could break out.

The Cuban missile crisis is implied as a parallel to the events unfolding in the film but, of course, that crisis did not end in a nuclear war—not least because of an awareness on both sides of the risks involved in going over the brink.

Those of us who do have the responsibility of addressing how war can best be avoided must do this coolly and rationally—not on the basis of Hollywood emotion.

We know that progress in negotiating with the Soviet Union comes from a policy of maintaining our defences while offering the opportunity for fair and verifiable arms control agreements. That is what we have been trying to achieve in the talks in Geneva about INF.

READY

While these talks have been going on, the Soviet Union has increased the number of its SS20 missiles by 40 per cent. We did not use this as a reason to pull out of the talks. We kept at it.

The Russians have now walked out because the first Western missiles to counter the SS20 are being delivered. But we remain ready to resume the talks as soon as they are willing to do so.

And without waiting for any Soviet response, NATO is anxious to cut nuclear stockpiles. I agreed with my colleagues in NATO a few weeks ago reductions which will mean that the West's warheads in Europe will have been reduced by one-third over the period 1979-1988.

We must press ahead with all steps that will offer real progress towards disarmament. What we must not do is to let the Soviets unnerve us. What we must not do is let "media events" like The Day After unnerve us.

The Soviets will keep up their war of nerves. They have nothing to lose by waiting to see what impact pro test groups in the West may have.

And there is no prospect of the Soviet leadership allowing films to be shown that might unnerve the population. Any more than there is any prospect that there will be protest marches or demonstrations around Soviet nuclear bases this weekend.

And a final thought...

I have no quarrel with ITV for showing The Day After. The fact they are able to do so—despite the misgivings of many—is yet another strength of the democracy we seek to defend. But I do think they should recognise it for what it is.

Watch it, by all means. But DO question its "message".

It is the message of ultimate failure.

It is a message in stark contrast to the reality that our policies of deterrence have kept the peace in Western Europe for the longest period of contemporary history.